

FACT SHEET

WATER REPELLENT FABRICS LOOK ALL SEWN UP

Becky Saunders*

Water repellent and waterproof fabrics are now more popular and easier to sew than ever before. Since waterproof or water repellent fabrics are often effective in blocking wind, they are ideal for outdoor sportswear.

Water repellent finishes make a fabric resistant to becoming wet but are not waterproof. These finishes allow air to circulate and are more comfortable than waterproof finishes. Water repellent finishes may be permanent or only semi-permanent; they could lose their effectiveness after laundering. Waterproof finishes, on the other hand, close the pores of the fabric and enable it to shed water and hold out air under all circumstances; therefore, they are often clammy and uncomfortable.

Water repellent and resistant fabrics are most often nylon, but may be cotton, polyester or a blend. Common fabric types include poplin, taffeta, ripstop, duck, faille, chintz and ciré (pronounced seer-ray).

Pattern and Fabric Selection

Water resistant fabrics may not look or feel different from any other fabric. Or they may appear slick, shiny or dull on the right side or be stiff and crisp. For

quilted looks, prequilted fabrics are available. Weigh the pros and cons of quilting fabrics yourself. Also, remember that quilted or lined garments are warmer than single-layer garments.

Check fabric labels for recommended care. Consider any additional expense as you select your fabric.

Check the recommended fabrics section on the pattern envelope. Also, use pattern illustrations to coordinate the fabric with the pattern. Simple design lines are ideal for water repellent fabrics; loose-fitting designs leave room for layering underneath. Check, if needed, to see if compatible water repellent or waterproof notions such as decorative, separating or jumpsuit zippers are available before selecting fabric.

Depending upon fabric body and design, interfacing may or may not be needed. For washable fashion fabrics, choose washable sewn-in or fusible interfacings. Always pretest fusible interfacing on a fabric scrap before using it, and use interfacing only on a facing or underneath garment parts.

Layout and Cutting

Before cutting out the pattern, preshrink all fabrics and zippers the same way the garment will be cared for later (hand wash, machine wash or dry clean).

Most waterproof and many water repellent fabrics

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cannot be pinned within the pattern piece because pinning leaves permanent marks. If in doubt, pin in seam allowances and use tape or weights for layout.

For slippery finishes, lay slippery sides right side out to reduce sliding during cutting. Some fabrics look identical on both sides and do not have a right or wrong side.

Use dressmaker's carbon and a smooth-edged tracing wheel, marking pencil or tailor's chalk to mark on the wrong side of the fabric. However, test a fabric scrap first to avoid using any marks that show through to the right side.

Make as many fitting adjustments as possible before cutting since stitching lines will show on most fabrics. If in doubt about fit, make a test garment in an inexpensive fabric.

Since water repellent fabrics are difficult to ease, consider using the following specialized alteration to reduce set-in sleeve cap ease. To reduce the fullness, make a narrow $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch (2 mm) horizontal tuck in the pattern above the notches, removing a total of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (4 mm). Redraw the sleeve cap curve (see Figure 1). (This alteration may not be comfortable or becoming to an individual with a fuller than average upper arm.)

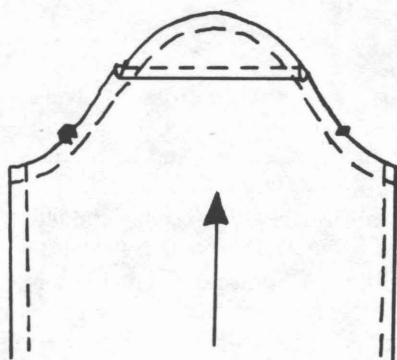


Figure 1.

Sewing Tips

Many fabrics ravel excessively. Those that do are best finished by searing the raw edge, especially for nylon, ripstop and taffeta, or by using a special seam finish or seam technique.

Searing applies heat to the fabric's raw edge and prevents raveling by melting the edge. First, test searing on fabric scraps; then practice before attempting it on permanent pieces. Trim any long yarns from the fabric edge. Light a dripless candle or an alcohol burner in a well-ventilated room. Hold the fabric edge

tautly. Move it quickly past blue base of flame (see Figure 2). Proper searing forms a small hard bead along the edge of the fabric; a heavy brown bead or scorch means oversearing.

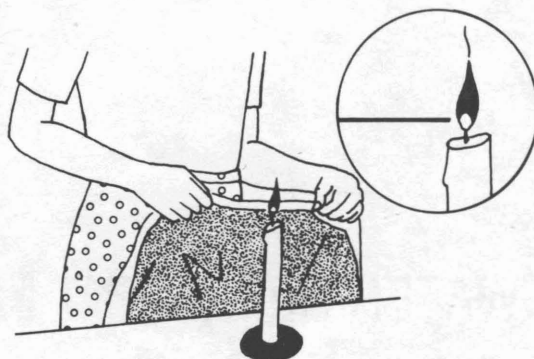


Figure 2.

Suitable seams for unseared edges include a plain seam with a turned under, bound or zig-zagged edge. Flat-fell and French seams are ideal but are only suitable for straight or slightly curved seams. Topstitched seams give a decorative finish, keep seams and seam allowances flat and prevent raveling when seam allowances are turned under and topstitched along the edge. To stitch seams, pin sections together in seam allowances or hold them together with paper clips or double stick tape within seam allowances.

Test stitch a fabric scrap and adjust your machine for an attractive stitch. For most fabrics, use loose but balanced tension, light pressure, medium to medium-long stitch length, size 11 (80) or 14 (90) all-purpose needle and all-purpose synthetic thread. Because of the fabric, needles will dull quickly and should be changed often.

Whenever possible, try to sew with right sides together on the inside. When stitching slick finished fabrics to the outside, use a roller or coated presser foot or tissue paper strips against the fabric to prevent slipping.

Topstitching is very effective. Use one strand of topstitching thread or two strands of all purpose thread in the top of the machine to highlight stitches. When using two strands thread both identically, separating between different tension discs. Also, use a size 16 (100) needle and a long straight or decorative stitch length. Test stitch for the most pleasing effect.

For heavier weight waterproof fabrics, consider adding ventilation holes under the arms, along the

side or in the crotch area. Try a test sample to determine whether or not this is desirable and the best method. Consider punched holes, metal eyelets or machine made eyelets (see Figure 3).

Pressing

Test the iron setting (especially if you want to use steam) on a scrap of fabric, beginning with the iron set for the fiber content. Many fabrics are heat sensitive. Always use a press cloth when pressing the garment on the right side.

Finger-pressing can be used as a substitute to pressing with an iron, particularly when creasing or flattening. To finger-press, run your fingernail firmly along the fabric (see Figure 4).

Care

Follow fabric labels for recommended care. Most water repellent fabrics are machine washable and dryable at low temperatures, while many waterproof fabrics only require sponging off. Some water repellent fabrics may lose their effectiveness to repel water after several launderings. Some waterproof fabrics cannot be dry cleaned since the process may harden and change fabric texture. Always ask for a fabric care label that you can sew into the garment as a permanent reference.

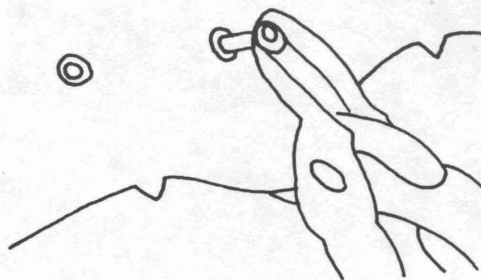


Figure 3.

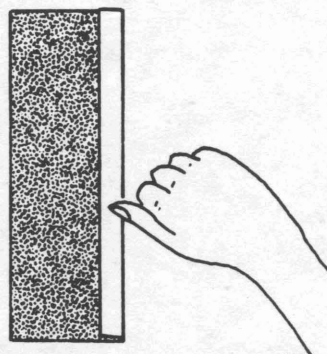
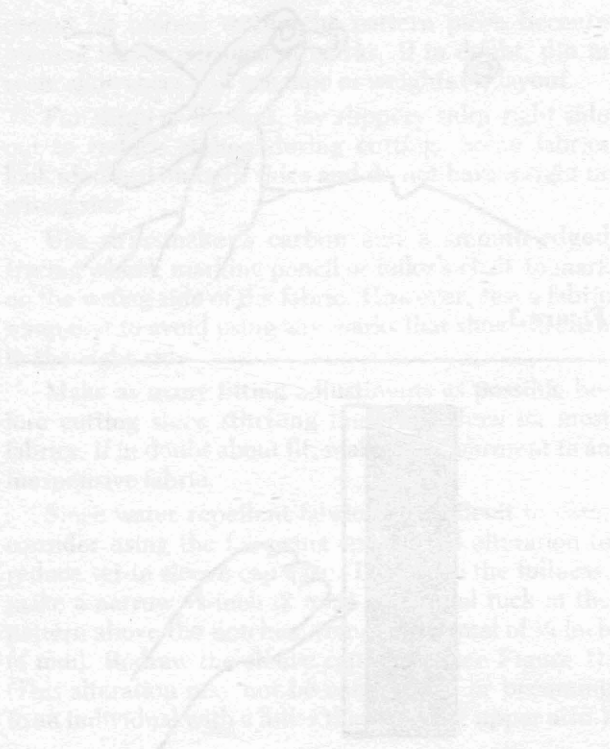


Figure 4.

References

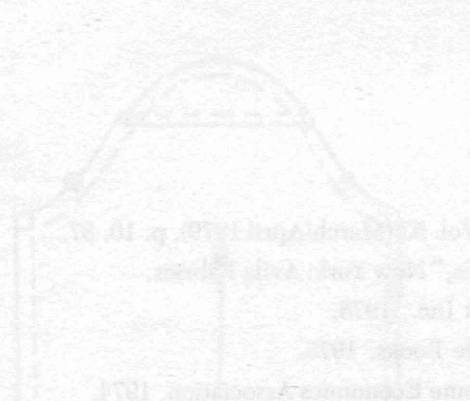
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